



DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

February 18, 2015

Senator Alberta Darling
317 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53703

Representative John Nygren
Room 309 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Senator Darling and Representative Nygren,

As you discuss locations and the number of Joint Committee on Finance public hearings on the 2015-2017 State Budget, we ask that you consider adding locations for public hearings in order to give all Wisconsin citizens the opportunity to voice their opinion.

In his budget, Governor Walker has proposed many dramatic changes that harm the very institutions that have made Wisconsin a great place to live and work. The budget includes drastic changes to our public school system, public lands and the state's legacy of conservation, the University of Wisconsin System, and access to healthcare for seniors - our most vulnerable citizens. Wisconsinites have reacted strongly and are watching the budget process more closely than they ever have before. Our constituents have demonstrated that they have strong opinions on this budget and they want to be heard. As we debate the budget, we should consider public hearings at a time convenient to working families and in locations that will be most impacted.

The massive cuts to the University of Wisconsin System are a centerpiece of discussion as we begin debate on the budget. There are 26 UW System Campuses in Wisconsin. At least two public hearings should be held on campuses. Tough decisions are quickly approaching, not just for these public institutions but for UW students, their families, and the many business owners across the state who benefit from the talent the UW System produces and the innovation and research that creates the jobs of today and tomorrow. These cuts make the UW System less accessible, less affordable, and damage its ability to maintain its world class reputation. We must allow the students, families and communities impacted by these cuts a convenient way to express their opinions.

The Governor's budget includes many provisions that attack Wisconsin's rich heritage in conservation and natural resources. This budget kneecaps the Department of Natural Resources Board, eliminates 66 full time positions targeting science, education and communication staff, and has major cuts in Conservation and Environment Education. Most dramatically, the budget freezes the Knowles - Nelson Stewardship Program until 2028. The namesake of this program demonstrates the bi-partisan support for this popular plan to protect Wisconsin's beautiful and rare public places. This program has been supported by a diverse group of Governors and Legislatures in a strong effort to preserve Wisconsin's valuable natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and fisheries, and to expand opportunities

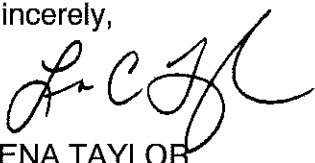
for outdoor recreation for everyone in our state. The Rhinelander area, like many others, has a number of recreational sites preserved by the Stewardship Program that support the local economy. It is our hope to have a hearing in this location to better understand the impact these cuts would have in a place where recreational economic development is thriving year round and provides the foundation for their local economy

Additionally, K-12 schools are targeted for significant cuts in the Governor's budget with an over \$127 million decrease to education funding, while private voucher schools are expanded and will drain money from public schools. This is a constituency that deserves the opportunity to voice their opinion at a public hearing when teachers are not in classes and parents are not at work. An evening public hearing would be an excellent opportunity to hear from this large group of families that will be significantly impacted by these cuts. Nearly every high school in the state has the facilities and means to be able to accommodate this type of public hearing. As you know, in rural areas of this state high schools are the center of the community. We request at least one public hearing in a rural community high school. Governor Walker's budget also does not include the over \$345 million in taxpayers funds secured by the Federal government if we make the choice to expand healthcare coverage opportunities for the people of this state. We have the power to do what is right for the people of this state regardless of political decisions that have resulted in 26,000 people falling through the cracks without BadgerCare and without coverage in the Federal exchange. This budget spends Wisconsin taxpayer money to cover an increasing state portion of the Medicaid budget while at the same time refusing federal funds that are owed to our people and our state coffers. While there is not a singular location where we can hear from the 26,000 people without healthcare, we would implore the co-chairs to make a concerted effort to reach people that are currently uninsured or may become uninsured by holding a public hearing that can be attended by the working poor of this state.

Finally, Governor Walker's budget is about choices, and he is choosing to ask the hard-working families of this state to make significant sacrifices. For example, the proposed cut to the SeniorCare program which forces consumers into the more expensive and complicated Medicare Part D plan is a huge concern for Wisconsin senior citizens and taxpayers. Senior citizens require this program to access the affordable prescription drugs they depend on to maintain their health. Those without healthcare live in every corner of the state; in our bigger cities and on roads where unincorporated defines the neighborhood.

The Governor's budget weakens the strong public structures the people of this state have built and value. These cuts will have a direct effect on the economy and quality of life for our people not just next year and the year after, but for decades. Our decisions matter in every corner of the state. Our economy is built on the back of our citizens and the hard work and money they have expended building this state. We are available to meet and discuss public hearings at any time and are committed to helping find appropriate locations in every corner of this state. Thank you very much for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



LENA TAYLOR
State Senator
4th District



CHRIS TAYLOR
State Representative
76th District



JON ERPENBACH
State Senator
27th District



GORDON HINTZ
State Representative
54th District